

**Statement of
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Veterans Health Administration
Department of Veterans Affairs
before the
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States House of Representatives**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to present my views on the potential sharing agreement with DoD on the Fitzsimons campus. I am Lawrence A. Biro, Director for the VA Rocky Mountain Healthcare Network, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 19. VISN 19 serves an area covering the state of Utah, most of Montana, Wyoming and Colorado, and portions of Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, Nebraska, and North Dakota. This network provides healthcare for approximately 140,000 veterans at six medical centers and 32 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC).

In his May 2004 CARES Decision document, Secretary Principi made the following decision concerning the building of a new healthcare facility in Denver. I quote from the Decision document:

“VA will build a replacement VA medical center through a sharing agreement with DoD on the Fitzsimmons [sic] campus with some shared facilities with the University of Colorado.”

The Federal facility at Fitzsimons is a Joint Venture concept based in part on the VA/Air Force work in Las Vegas, Nevada and Albuquerque, New Mexico. As planned, this facility will be a Federal tower housing the medical services of Denver VAMC and the medical services of Buckley Air Force Base. The Air Force will occupy approximately seven percent of the building for clinical and administrative purposes.

The new facility will expand the capability of the Denver VA Medical Center by significantly increasing the amount of space available for clinical

services. Among services being considered, a new spinal cord injury center will be a part of this new facility, and other expanded clinical services, such as a 20-bed sub-acute care unit. In addition, a new 60 bed VA Nursing Home Care Unit will be located on the Fitzsimons campus.

This relocation is also intended to maximize efficiencies within the Federal tower by working closely to share some facilities with the University of Colorado Hospital. To obtain these efficiencies the new Federal tower must be located as near as possible to the existing and planned facilities of the University of Colorado Hospital. To that end, the University of Colorado Hospital has reserved a plot of land in close proximity of the existing and planned structures of the medical center.

This move to the Fitzsimons Campus makes complete sense. The University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and the University of Colorado Hospital (UCH) are totally committed to this site. Their outpatient complex is now complete and in operation. There is extensive research space that is near completion. The close proximity in conjunction with this well-established and long-standing affiliation will allow the use of university expertise for hyper acute and highly specialized care.

Acquisition of this property could occur through a long-term lease with the University of Colorado. VA's General Counsel has advised us that VA currently lacks authority to enter into long-term leases that would give the Department sufficient interest in the land to allow VA to build a facility here, which we estimate may cost \$328 million. For a project of this magnitude, I believe that authority for a lease of much greater duration would be needed to ensure the government has sufficient interest in the land.

If we cannot obtain a long-term lease, we will be forced to look for land that the government can purchase outright on or close to Fitzsimons. Although the new facility would continue to be a joint Federal health care tower between VA and the Department of Defense, our opportunities to gain greater efficiencies through sharing arrangements with the University of Colorado might be more limited. Therefore we are grateful to the Committee for introducing legislation

that contains a provision that would assist us in relocating to the Fitzsimons Campus of the University of Colorado.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would now be happy to answer any questions you and other Members of the Subcommittee might have.